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# TWEED FOR

While traditionally known for its beaches and surf breaks, the Tweed region of northern New South Wales delivers fine food – and gin – in equal measure, as Susan Gough-Henly discovers.

# ALL SEASONS

The crimson sun is setting over Wirui Estate in the foothills of the McPherson Range, straddling the coastal border between New South Wales and

Queensland. A gourmet spread is laid out on the deck of Zeta's Coffee's Origin House, our home for the first evening of our road trip exploring the lesser-known gems of the Tweed region. Tania Usher at Blue Ginger Picnics has curated local delicacies for our feast, including award-winning Debbie Allard's brie, clothbound cheddar and reblochon cheese; Miele D'Oro honey; Cubby Bakehouse baguettes; Grumpy Grandma's olives; Spice Palace dukkah and pesto; and Kitz Living Foods' chunky bars of fig and macadamia.

It's a delicious introduction to this gorgeous pocket of NSW, just north of Byron Bay. We've put together a three-day itinerary that continues the theme, allowing us to savour tropical fruits and vegetables, paddock-to-plate cuisine, hand-crafted drinks and engaging artistic endeavours. Today we have the roads to ourselves and plenty of room to explore the laid-back country town of Murwillumbah and character-filled villages that surround, like Tumbulgum and Uki, not to mention the broad sweep of Cabarita Beach, named Australia's sexiest stretch of sand for 2020 by Tourism Australia.

## Regional diversity

It's no accident that this area is such a culinary hotspot – the Tweed Shire sits inside the largest caldera in the southern hemisphere, an outrageously fertile bowl created by the collapse of a massive volcano whose only remains is craggy Wollumbin, formerly known as Mount Warning, a sacred men's site for the Bundjalung people. The fecundity is ever-present on our road trip, as we pass bougainvillea, bananas and maples, palms, pineapples, macadamia, avocados, roses and orange trees.

After our aperitif picnic, we tootle down the hill to Potager restaurant for chargrilled Australian bay lobster and potato gnocchi with mushrooms, local walnuts and black garlic – plus greens fresh from the four-hectare farm gardens that surround. Then it's time for a serene sleep in Origin House's cloud-like bed.

Next morning, birds serenade us as we sip Zeta's coffee while wandering among the bean plantations (Campos roasts single-origin Wirui



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Estate coffee). Full of fuel, we enjoy a self-guided walking tour to admire the geometric stepped rooftops, sunburst ceilings and rounded windows of Murwillumbah's fascinating Art Deco architecture. At the M-Arts Precinct, we discover an edgy creative space where artists and jewellers work out of repurposed shipping containers – be sure to check out the superb vintage-style jewellery at Ghost and Lola.

Lunch is at the airy cafe of the Tweed Regional Gallery, with sweeping views over the lime-green valley. We spend the afternoon admiring the still-life paintings of Margaret Olley, one of Australia's most beloved artists, as well as her carefully recreated, jam-packed Paddington studio.

Heading into the hills we arrive at La Rocher Eco Retreat, with its infinity pool and hot

*“We're mesmerised by migrating humpback whales just offshore, and must drag ourselves away for breakfast”*

tub and four luxurious villas offering dress-circle views of Wollumbin. We enjoy wine and cheese on the deck beside a roaring fire (the outdoor-indoor fireplace warms the patio as well as the bedroom), before a drive down the hill to Mavis's Kitchen, set in a lofty wooden Queenslander house. Here, we feast on slow-cooked lamb followed by rosewater-and-pistachio pavlova with tropical fruits. Back at La Rocher, after a candlelit bath, we slip into bed in velour bathrobes.

#### Daily culinary diversions

When we wake, we enjoy the best croissants this side of Paris, courtesy of Ben's Patisserie in Murwillumbah (it's not hyperbole – they're really that good), before heading to Uki village for freshly-roasted coffee at Bastion Lane Espresso. This place just happens to live inside the coolest little post office in Australia, Art Post Uki, which Gary Wall has transformed into an ersatz community centre combining traditional postal services with excellent coffee and an art gallery.

Lunch is in nearby Burringbar village at the turquoise Elwood Café, where the owners have combined city cool and country ease in

disarmingly delicious local food – and, more seriously, good coffee. It's the corner cafe of everybody's dreams.

We toast all the passionate Tweed producers on the sun-dappled lawns of Husk Distillers' glamorous cellar door – what better place to have that perfect gin and tonic? The establishment's Ink Gin is Brett-Whiteley-blue in the bottle, thanks to the addition of butterfly pea flowers in the botanicals – it turns blush-pink when mixed with tonic. There's a bright-red sloe gin liqueur, too, and Australia's first paddock-to-bottle agricole rum, crafted from fresh cane juice grown, pressed and fermented on site.

Checking in to the penthouse of The Beach Cabarita, we swoon at its gob-smacking views of sweeping Cabarita Beach, before a grand-finale dinner at Byron-born, Noma-trained Ben Devlin's Pipit Restaurant. The *Good Food Guide's* 2020 regional restaurant of the year is an ode to sustainable seafood and poultry, fruits and vegetables. We particularly love the wholemeal sourdough with tasty 'waste paste'; potato noodles with pipis, purslane and golden garlic; and passionfruit crème brûlée set inside the fruit pods. Check out the plates, too, made by neighbour-collaborators, gritCERAMICS.

#### Tasty finale

The next morning, propped in our four-poster bed, we're mesmerised by migrating humpback whales just off shore, and must drag ourselves away for breakfast at organic Farm&Co. This isn't your average morning meal, but the fluffiest of eggs sourced straight from their chickens, scratching the rich red earth outside.

Each experience tantalises us in this manner. We stock up on just-picked lettuces, heirloom tomatoes, herbs, sweet potatoes and bunches of sunflowers cut out in the field. We're intent on bringing some of that Tweed sunshine and goodness back home. ♦

#### Travel file

**Accommodation**  
[zetascoffee.com.au](http://zetascoffee.com.au) [larocher.com](http://larocher.com) [thebeachcabarita.com.au](http://thebeachcabarita.com.au)  
[halcyonhouse.com.au](http://halcyonhouse.com.au)

**Getting there**  
 The Tweed is a nine-hour drive from Sydney and a 1.5-hour drive from Brisbane. Alternatively, fly to the Gold Coast Airport or Ballina Byron Gateway Airport, both of which are a short drive from the region.

**Dining**  
[potager.com.au](http://potager.com.au) [huskdistillers.com](http://huskdistillers.com) [maviseskitchen.com.au](http://maviseskitchen.com.au)  
[bastionlane.com](http://bastionlane.com) [farmandco.com.au](http://farmandco.com.au) [pipitrestaurant.com](http://pipitrestaurant.com)

**Experience**  
[m-arts.com.au](http://m-arts.com.au) [artgallery.tweed.nsw.gov.au](http://artgallery.tweed.nsw.gov.au)

**Information**  
[visithetweed.com.au](http://visithetweed.com.au)



01 A renovated motel, Halcyon House has an award-winning restaurant and new spa  
 02 Surfing at Tweed Heads © Destination NSW  
 03 The Tweed region's bountiful produce © Destination NSW  
 04 Blissing out at La Rocher  
 05 An epic picnic spread by Blue Ginger  
 06 Husk's distinctive Ink Gin  
 07 A patio with a view at Origin House

